

## **WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**COMMITTEE:            OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION**

**DATE:                    July 29, 2009**

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS    KENNY  
                      TESSIER  
                      MERLINO  
                      CHAMPAGNE  
                      SIMMES  
                      GOODSPEED

**COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:**

SUPERVISOR      BENTLEY

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

KRISTEN SHAW, JR. ACCOUNTANT  
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM  
MICHAEL CONSUELO, SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR  
LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK  
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER  
HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE & FISCAL  
                      SERVICES  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
SUPERVISOR BELDEN  
SUPERVISOR PITKIN  
SUPERVISOR TAYLOR  
SUPERVISOR STRAINER  
SUPERVISOR SHEEHAN  
LUISA CRAIGE-SHERMAN, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF  
                      CHAMBERS  
RON MONTESI, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
                      CONSERVATION  
BILL DUTCHER, AMERICADE  
MAURY THOMPSON, *THE POST STAR*  
THOM RANDALL, *THE ADIRONDACK JOURNAL*  
JOANNE COLLINS, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mr. Kenny called the meeting of the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee to order at 10:32 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Champagne and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 1, 2009 Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Ron Montesi, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), who requested permission to present an Occupancy Tax funding request relative to the New York State Association of Conservation District's (NYACD) Annual Meeting to be held from October 18 - 20, 2009 at the Fort William Henry. He said there were approximately fifty eight soil and water districts statewide. He stated that although 150 attendees had originally been anticipated, the number had increased to nearly 200. He noted that the amount of funding requested was \$1,500 to help support a reception for all attendees to be held on Sunday night. He apprised that Senator Gillibrand and Congressman Murphy had been invited and Congressman Murphy had confirmed his attendance for Sunday night. He stated that both Senator Little and Assemblywoman Sayward planned to attend the Monday morning opening ceremony. Relative to transportation, he noted the DEC had generously offered the use of one

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bus and Robert Blais, Mayor of the Village of Lake George, offered the use of one Trolley for the event.

Mr. Montesi stated that workshops would be held throughout the event and a tour of Warren County projects would be offered on Sunday from 1:00-4:00 p.m., lead by Dave Wick, District Manager of the Warren County Soil & Water Conservation District. He stated the tour would include viewing several Lake George area projects, such as the diverters installed in private parking lots which removed sedimentation from Route 9, dry hydrants, and concluding the tour with a trip up Prospect Mountain to see the stream bank restoration and to enjoy the view.

Mr. Montesi offered that Warren County may wish to take advantage of the opportunity to provide a tourism display in the hallway of the Fort William Henry Conference Center.

Mr. Tessier asked Mr. Montesi if he had sought Occupancy Tax funding elsewhere such as from the Village of Lake George and Mr. Montesi replied in the negative. Mr. Tessier urged Mr. Montesi to seek other funding sources.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kristen Shaw, Jr. Account in the Treasurer's Office, who distributed copies of the Warren County Occupancy Tax Revenues & Expenditures Report for the period ending June 30, 2009, *a copy of which is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Shaw explained that relative to the Warren County Occupancy Tax Revenue Analysis, the figures for 2004 through 2008 were full year figures and the 2009 figure reflected a partial year figure through June. Mr. Kenny added that the actual revenue had decreased by approximately 16-17%. Ms. Shaw pointed out that payments for June through August would be received in September which would boost revenues significantly. Mr. Kenny noted that the County had experienced an extreme economic downturn, and he stated that uncooperative summer weather had influenced tourism.

Pertaining to revenue collected through June 30th for 2008 and 2009, Ms. Shaw reported a decrease of \$132,721.19 for 2009.

Mr. Kenny announced that the Committee would adjourn to a workshop session at 10:43 a.m.

Committee reconvened at 10:51 a.m. and Mr. Kenny invited comments from Committee members.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne and seconded by Mr. Merlino to approve the request for \$1,500 as outlined above. The motion failed due to the lack of a majority vote, with Mrs. Simmes and Messrs. Tessier and Kenny voting in opposition.

Mr. Belden stated that he had attended the event in Geneva, NY last year and felt it was productive and would bring business to the area. He noted that many individuals of the Soil and Water Departments had never visited the region and often brought spouses and family members on the trip.

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Mr. Kenny apprised that there was sufficient time for Mr. Montesi to seek funding from the Village of Lake George.

Motion was made by Mr. Goodspeed, seconded by Mr. Champagne and carried by majority vote to provide funding in the amount of \$750 (half of the amount requested) for the New York State Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting as outlined above, with Mr. Tessier voting in opposition, and the necessary resolution was authorized for the August 21, 2009 Board meeting. *A copy of the Application For Contract Funding With Warren County Under The Tourist And Convention Development Agreement is on file with the minutes.*

Addressing New Business, Mr. Kenny recommended that the Committee consider a change in rules prior to the December meeting, in order to establish a minimum number of bed nights to qualify requests for funding. According to Mr. Kenny, special event funding was intended for larger events and he suggested that the number of beds be in the range of 250-350 in order to qualify. He added that such funding was not intended for smaller events. He stated that a decision was not necessary today and the issue would be raised in the November and/or December Committee meeting(s).

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Goodspeed asked the Committee to consider proportionality relative to location, as small towns benefited from smaller events.

Mr. Kenny supported the notion of proportionality and he reiterated that the issue could be discussed at future Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee meetings.

Relative to proportionality, Mr. Taylor suggested that the same rationale be applied for the amount requested in relation to bed nights. Mr. Kenny affirmed the suggestion and stated that it made sense that the amount of funding awarded would be relative to the number of beds for a given event.

Supporting the current process, Mr. Champagne conveyed his opposition to changes and he stated that he felt the current strategy had succeeded. He noted that it was easier to deny an application than to set arbitrary parameters and impose additional criteria which could further complicate the process.

Mr. Tessier apprised that every application that had been denied by the County and forwarded to the Town of Lake George was approved for funding by the Town. He further stated that the Town had not denied any applications for funding and it was appropriate for the Towns to use bed tax revenue in this manner.

In consideration of due process, Mr. Kenny apprised that the County Attorney held the responsibility of reviewing annual occupancy tax reports from the municipalities, and the information was not forwarded to this Committee.

Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, stated that when an event was funded by Occupancy Tax, the bed count should be reported at the next Committee meeting. Mr. Kenny stated that such figures had been reported in this manner.

In reference to the truck show held in Lake George last month which was sponsored by the County, Mr. Payne pointed out that the event was unsuccessful which underscored the need to see the figures prior to subsequent requests for the same event. Kate Johnson, Director of Tourism, offered to bring the figures to the meeting in the future and she stated that the figures from a prior event were typically noted on the applications.

Mr. Kenny asked the Committee if they would like to discuss changes to the Occupancy Tax Coordination Special Event Funding process at a future meeting and Mr. Tessier stated that he felt the process should remain unchanged. Mr. Kenny stated that the process would remain unchanged at this time and Committee members were welcome to bring the issue back for consideration at a future time.

Bill Dutcher, Event Coordinator for Americade, suggested that the County peruse the data contained in the Smith Travel Reports which reported daily hotel occupancy figures. Ms. Johnson noted that the Department received the report and it was a useful tool. Mr. Kenny noted that he reviewed the report on a weekly basis.

Mr. Strainer asked if the Towns reported on Occupancy Tax expenditures and Mr. Kenny stated the information was filed with the County Attorney's Office and the Committee was not privileged to obtain such information.

A discussion ensued.

Mr. Champagne stated that the responsibility of the Towns was to enable the County Attorney to insure that the money was expended in a legal manner. Mr. Kenny noted that the Towns communicated the effective use of the funds to the County Attorney, and if the money was expended in accordance with the law, it was not the business of the Committee. Mr. Belden added that the funds could not be used for capital projects.

Mr. Goodspeed noted that the Town of Johnsburg had formed a Committee for the purpose of grading and scoring the applications that were submitted to the Town.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mike Consuelo, Special Events Coordinator, who distributed copies of the agenda to Committee members, *a copy of which is on file with the minutes*. Acknowledging the airing of the NBC Today Show at the Sagamore Resort on July 27th, he congratulated Ms. Johnson and her team for their efforts which offered great visibility of the region to the viewing populous which, he said, reached meeting and convention planners as well, offering potential opportunities therein.

Mr. Consuelo reported that a site visit had been conducted with Mr. Charles Melear, the lead individual of the United Church of God in Colorado. He said the Church had been located in Saratoga Springs since the mid 1990's before relocating to Pennsylvania. Mr. Consuelo stated that the visit commenced on Sunday with a tour of the Great Escape Lodge which was the

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place of accommodation. He continued that the itinerary for Monday began at 4:00 a.m to attend the NBC Today Show which aired in Bolton Landing. Mr. Consuelo praised the event and the opportunity it presented to showcase the Sagamore Resort and the Bolton Landing and Lake George region. He further stated that the motorcoach route offered to Mr. Melear included the viewing of condominiums and cottages, as attendance for the convention was expected to be approximately 1,200 to 1,300. In terms of planning, he noted that a three year contract for establishing a location for the convention would take place this fall. Mr. Consuelo asserted that the event represented an important business opportunity for the area with the use of motels, hotels, and long-term stays at condominiums and cottages. He noted that the location for the convention was more critical than the accommodations due to the size of the group.

Pertaining to convention sites, Mr. Consuelo said a tour of the West Brook (formerly Gaslight Village) property took place, and he commended Mr. Tessier for the positive changes that had been made. He noted that the West Brook property was not large enough for this event; therefore, he said, tours of the Lake George Forum and the Glens Falls Civic Center followed, concluding with a Lake George boat cruise.

Mr. Consuelo noted that attendees for the convention came from the northeast and mid-Atlantic states and Mr. Melear would report back to him from Colorado next week regarding the details of their needs and preferences for a convention center.

Mr. Consuelo noted that he had also met with several Supervisors and would continue to set up visits with the others to gain familiarity with their communities.

Mr. Kenny reported that he attended a meeting which included Mr. Consuelo, Luisa Craig-Sherman of the Warren County Council of Chambers, and the Tourism Department wherein questions arose which required referrals to the County Attorney who advised against the use of Occupancy Tax Funds for religious events with the purpose of promoting the teachings of the Church.

Relative to the positive impact of the NBC Today Show on location in Bolton Landing, Ms. Johnson noted that an employment recruiter for the Glens Falls Hospital conveyed the positive impact that the program had on her objectives with regard to the recruitment of medical professionals.

As there was no further business to come before the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee, on motion made by Mr. Merlino and seconded by Mr. Tessier, Mr. Kenny adjourned the meeting at 11:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Collins, Legislative Office Specialist